They Gave Us Good Dreams

Music

Del. Eleanor Holmes Norton, US House of Representatives, (D-DC):
For those of us who lived in the segregated society, education was everything. We believed that education was the only way to get around discrimination.

Barbara Richards, teacher:
My mother understood this and she was a maid; she did housework. And she did not want her daughter to have to put up with this sort of thing, scrub people's floors, or whatever.

Evelyn Fox Cunningham, journalist, *The Pittsburgh Courier*:
It almost seems like a cliché when you talk about dreaming of an education when there are bigger dreams out there, bigger things you want to do, and bigger things you talk about. But we basically knew that this was the beginning. This is where one had to be able to function and to excel.

Norton:
We saw no other way, so education was the be-all, end-all. We had to have it. If you didn't have it, you were both black and uneducated, and that was the worst thing in the world to be.

Music

Narrator:
Most of the 4 million people freed from slavery at the end of the Civil War were illiterate. Only a few had defied the law and learned to read and write.

Badi Foster, president, Phelps-Stokes Fund:
We have slavery, and we have the war, and we get freed. There is this pent-up demand to learn how to read. And if you know how to read, you have a moral obligation to reach back and help me.

Music

Narrator:
During Reconstructions, help came from northern charities that built agricultural and technical schools throughout the South. In time, these schools became full-fledged universities. But segregation limited job opportunities for African American graduates

with advanced degrees. Most of them wound up teaching at primary and secondary schools.

Leonard Williams, attorney:
My science teacher was a Ph.D. in physics and chemistry. The poor guy was teaching high school. He probably, if he had been, if he had had opportunities in employment, he probably would have been working for DuPont making ten times as much money. But that's what was available to him.

Edwilda Allen Isaac, teacher:
Our teachers were devoted to us to see that we would learn. If I was having trouble in math, the math teacher would have me come to her house on Saturdays so she could tutor me.

Rev. J. Samuel Williams, Jr., minister, activist:
Our teachers were very positive, very learned people and they, for the most part, drove us. They gave us good dreams.

Music

Barbara Richards:
Let me welcome you to the 25th National ACT-SO competition here in this beautiful land of Houston, Texas.

Narrator:
Barbara Richards is one of hundreds of teachers who help African American youngsters like these realize their dreams. They do so through a Saturday morning mentoring program called ACT-SO. Sponsored by the NAACP, this program fosters respect for education among African American youngsters.

ACT-SO Mentor:
Are you still thinking about watercolor? Are you thinking about mixed media? What are you thinking about doing?

Narrator:
ACT-SO mentors help high school students develop competitive projects in the arts, sciences, and humanities.

Barbara Richards:
Mentoring is very important. Our youngsters need an atmosphere in which they can thrive and that they can develop.

ACT-SO Mentor:
So, for next week, if you don't feel like reading one of your own poems, please be willing to read someone else's poem. Something, just so you get a feel for the reading, that's what we're really working on.

Choir, singing:
Yo yo yo yo yo yo yo…
Vernon Jarrett, journalist, ACT-SO founder:
I created ACT-SO out of the sum of the black experience, of the encouragement that African Americans once gave each other when they had nowhere else to go.

Jason Atkins, ACT-SO participant,
The title of my project is "Determining the Sensitivity of Technetium-99m Sestamiibi."

Narrator:
Jason Atkins is only one of hundreds of students competing in the national finals of the ACT-SO program. Students from every region of the nation prepared detailed projects in the sciences, humanities, and the arts.

Music

Vernon Jarrett:
This is a fantastic thing that we're trying to do with these kids today, to reorient them back into what contributed so much to our lives. How black people survived all the deprivations and shortcomings and exclusionist activities during the segregated period.

Brooke Ford, ACT-SO participant:
My name is Brooke Ford, I'm 17 years old. I saw the problem that current implants only last ten years, so if you could coat it with something that was biocompatible, that it would work. So I experimented with eight different polymers, and I found that sulfonated polystyrene works.

Music:
Sing on, just a little while longer…

Vernon Jarrett:
We've got to go back in the middle of this climate of racism and do what made it possible for me to get an education and to dream.

Music:
…everything will be all right.

Reginald Champagne, ACT-SO participant:
Hi, I'm Reginald Champagne. I'm from DuPage County Illinois ACT-SO Branch, and this is my fourth year in ACT-SO. I made a Navibot. My Navibot is sensing where the line is and making adjustments as necessary.

Stanley Voigt, ACT-SO participant:
I love math, and math has been my forte in high school. And as I go throughout college, I will take courses in math, but I'm going to study medicine in the long run.

Leonard Williams:
I think I was probably blessed to have had the experience and the exposure of having teachers who were dedicated and devoted and wanting to have us come out of there with strength, and so forth. I'd say 80% of the people who graduated from high school with me went to college.

Vernon Jarrett:
You have to become heroic in something other than the usual categories assigned to blacks. A scientist has a right to be a hero, a poet has a right to be a hero, a thinker, a philosopher has a right to be a hero, just as much as an athlete or an entertainer.